

# **Civic Engagement and Belonging Committee Charter for Vermont League of Cities and Towns**

## **Purpose**

As part of its mission “to serve and strengthen Vermont local government,” the VLCT Board has established a Civic Engagement and Belonging Committee with the purpose of aiding Vermont municipalities increase inclusive engagement.

## **Charge**

The Civic Engagement and Belonging Committee’s charge is to advise the VLCT staff and Board of Directors on how best to improve engagement, belonging and prosocial behavior to foster stronger, more connected communities.

## **Mission:**

The committee will investigate tools that municipalities may need and how to develop them, as well as explore other ways that VLCT can support its members as they seek to establish more inclusive communities through engagement and prosocial behavior.

## **Scope of Work**

As directed by the VLCT Board, the Committee’s work will be to assist VLCT in creating and monitoring an annual work plan. The Committee will serve as a liaison to municipalities seeking advice and support on how best to engage all people, especially those who have historically felt unwelcome or who have been marginalized.

## **Core Values**

- We want to help communities create environments where all people can thrive by expanding support and opportunities to all.
- We recognize the dignity in all people, and strive for maximum engagement and inclusivity regardless of race, color, religion, ethnicity, national origin, citizenship status, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, gender identity and expression, age, disability, or socioeconomic or housing status, or any other protected characteristics.
- We champion prosocial behavior -- behavior that promotes connection to one another regardless of race, color, religion, ethnicity, national origin, citizenship status, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, gender identity and expression, age, disability, or socioeconomic or housing status, or any other protected characteristics.
- We strive for civic excellence and recognize that our differences make our communities stronger.
- We promote a culture of respect and recognize that words and actions matter, and the absence of action and words also matter.
- Every municipality shares the responsibility of creating inclusive communities.

## **Guiding Principles**

In alignment with the VLCT Board's direction, the Civic Engagement and Belonging Committee will be guided by the following considerations:

1. Municipal officials need practical tips and resources to engage in community conversations and requests for action.
2. Municipal officials need tools to facilitate leadership to maximize engagement within their governing boards, at municipal meetings, and in their communities.
3. In many cases, member municipalities may need help understanding how to better engage with new Vermonters, historically under-represented Vermonters, and people who feel alienated from the traditional power structures of government.
4. Vermont's towns are mostly small to medium-sized, with an average population of 1200 and with little to no staff capacity to assist in engagement and belonging efforts.
5. Governing board members may take the lead or formally appoint volunteer committees or individuals to help them.
6. Most municipalities don't provide services beyond statutory requirements.
7. VLCT's relationship with municipal members, and the League's role to provide assistance and options.

### **Membership:**

1. The Civic Engagement and Belonging Committee is a temporary committee of the VLCT Board of Directors.
2. The VLCT Board of Directors shall appoint all members to the Civic Engagement and Committee in accordance with VLCT Bylaws.
3. The Executive Director shall conduct a search for volunteers from the VLCT membership in accordance with VLCT Board policy. The Civic Engagement Committee may appoint up to three members to a nominating committee who may recruit and recommend members to the Board. All those charged with building the committee shall seek a mix of volunteers with the following characteristics:
  - Municipal experience.
  - Varied types of experience and municipal positions.
  - Diversity with relation to race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability.
  - Represent varied types of cities and towns (rural and urban).
  - Represent varied geographies.
  - Committed to the dignity of all people, regardless of race, color, religion, ethnicity, national origin, citizenship status, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, gender identity and expression, age, disability, or socioeconomic or housing status, or any other protected characteristics.
4. The Civic Engagement and Belonging Committee shall have no fewer than fifteen (15) members, including any ex-officio members, and shall include a member of the VLCT Board. The VLCT Executive Director, the VLCT Director of Advocacy, the VLCT Director of the Municipal Assistance Center, and the VLCT Director of Operations shall serve as ex-officio members without voting rights. VLCT staff may serve irrespective of term limits.
5. Members will serve a two-year term on the Committee commencing after the annual

meeting and terminating at the next annual meeting, except that half of the members appointed in November of 2023 shall serve one-year in lieu of two-year terms as recommended by the Committee. Members who have already served a term may request to serve for up to two additional terms.

6. The committee shall have two co-chairs. A member from the VLCT Board shall be one of the two co-chairs. The second co-chair may not be a current Board member or staff member of VLCT.

### **Administration:**

1. The Committee shall meet January, March, May, July, September, and November and may choose to meet more frequently as deemed necessary to accomplish its responsibilities in appropriate time frames.
2. The co-chairs will be selected by the committee at the first business meeting of the year following the annual VLCT meeting. A member of VLCT's Board shall be a cochair.
3. The chair and/or co-chairs in collaboration with the VLCT Executive Director will be responsible for scheduling meetings, setting agendas, meeting facilitation, follow-up on action items, communications, and liaising with any consultants.
4. A quorum is defined as a simple majority of voting members (whether virtual or in person).
5. Committee consensus is reached when, after discussion, the majority of the members present agree that an action should or should not be recommended.
6. The committee will appoint a secretary to take minutes and distribute the minutes.
7. The Committee may form and delegate authority to one or more workgroups as it deems appropriate from time to time.
8. At least annually, the Committee will review and reassess the adequacy of this Charter and make changes to ensure efficient and effective progress towards the goals and objectives of the VLCT Strategic Plan.

### **Committee Member Responsibilities:**

1. Regularly attend Committee meetings and, if appointed, work group meetings.
2. Devote the time and engagement necessary to accomplish committee goals.
3. Commit to on-going professional development activities to build awareness and knowledge of justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging principles.
4. Attend and participate in Equity Committee events, activities, and initiatives. Any member with two or more consecutive absences shall be contacted by the Chair/Staff to ascertain their interest in continuing on the committee. Members missing three meetings in a year may be removed from the committee.
5. Appropriately represent the Committee and its principles internally and externally.
6. Use a prosocial lens when making all decisions related to the work of the Committee.
7. The Committee is responsible for recommending actions and/or activities to the VLCT Executive Director and Board.

### **Meeting Norms**

1. Listen actively -- respect others when they are talking.
2. Speak from your own experience.
3. Do not be afraid to respectfully challenge one another by asking questions but refrain from personal attacks -- focus on ideas.
4. Participate to the fullest of your ability -- growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.
5. The goal is not to agree -- it is to gain a deeper understanding.
6. Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses -- they can be as disrespectful as words.
7. Ask questions for clarification to help avoid making assumptions.
8. Make sure everyone's voice is heard.
9. Balance your participation - speak and listen.
10. Listen actively to teammates without interrupting others.
11. Clarify when you are advocating vs offering an idea.
12. Say it now, in the room. Avoid waiting till later to raise an issue.
13. All voices count. All opinions are valid but offer reasoning behind your thinking.
14. Ask for help: It's okay not to know.

Adopted by the VLCT Civic Engagement and Belonging Committee on May 18, 2026

Adopted by the VLCT Board of Directors on June 18, 2026